COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY
CHAIRMAN LAMAR SMITH

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Statement of Space Subcommittee Chairman Brian Babin (R-Texas)
Transforming America's Air Travel

Space Subcommittee Chairman Brian Babin: Before we begin this morning, I want to thank Chairman Smith and my colleagues for the opportunity to serve as the Chairman of the Space Subcommittee. It is truly an honor and a privilege. My district includes the Johnson Space Center and many of National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) astronauts, scientists, engineers, technicians, and contractors call the 36th district of Texas home. Because of this, I am keenly aware of the opportunities and challenges facing NASA and the aerospace sector. I look forward to working with Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Johnson, and Ranking Member Edwards this Congress. I also want to thank Chairman Palazzo for his leadership during what has been a very busy spring for the Space Subcommittee. Thankfully he is moving to the Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Science, and Justice which has jurisdiction over NASA spending, so I am certain we will stay in touch.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics, or "NACA." Founded in 1915 to "supervise and direct the scientific study of the problems of flight with a view to their practical solution," NACA was ultimately incorporated into NASA when Congress passed the *National Aeronautics and Space Act of 1958*. That same year, Congress also established the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) predecessor, the Federal Aviation Agency. NACA's legacy of civilian aeronautics and aviation research and development (R&D) is now carried out by NASA and FAA.

The aeronautics research carried out by these agencies is vital to our nation's prosperity. Aviation accounts for $1.5 trillion in economic activity and a $78.3 billion positive trade balance. Civil and general aviation is responsible for 11.8 million jobs in the U.S. and generates 5.4 percent of our gross domestic product. Put simply, aviation is one of the pillars of our economy.

While we currently enjoy the benefits of our nation's early investments in aeronautics R&D, other nations are now attempting to challenge our leadership. This is particularly troubling when the largest growth sector is not here in the U.S., but in Asia. In order to maintain our leadership, we must strategically prioritize our government investments, provide a competitive environment for industry, and coordinate and clearly define public and private sector efforts to maximize efficiencies and minimize duplication that may crowd-out investment.

If we are successful in these efforts, the potential aerospace breakthroughs in the coming decades are promising. Advances in hypersonic flight could revolutionize the aerospace sector. Continued research into supersonics and air traffic management could greatly reduce flight times. Structural and material research stands to improve safety and save lives. Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) R&D could benefit agriculture, search and rescue, fighting forest fires, mapping and surveying, and even package delivery.

In order to realize these benefits, we must be ever-vigilant. NASA and FAA will have to ensure that the research they support does not duplicate private sector investments. For instance, industry has a considerable incentive to develop safer, more reliable, and more efficient aircraft. Federal intervention and support should be limited to high-risk, high-reward research that the private sector cannot or will not do on their own. Without such prioritization, valuable resources risk being diluted among disparate tasks. This requires a great deal of coordination between NASA and the FAA. Many of the activities we will be discussing today are conducted by both these agencies.

In 2003, Congress established the Joint Planning Development Office (JPDO) to coordinate efforts between NASA, FAA, and other agencies to develop the Next Generation Air Transportation System (NextGen). JPDO functions were recently rolled into the NextGen program office, but the issue highlights an overarching theme that Congress will have to monitor. As budgets tighten, NASA should not be used as a piggy-bank for other agency requirements. As many have pointed out in the past, the first "A" in NASA is "aeronautics." But we need to be clear – aeronautics is more than just air traffic management, aviation efficiency, and green fuels. NASA has a long and proud tradition of pushing the boundaries of the possible, a legacy it should ensure continues into the future. Similarly, we need to ensure FAA is focused on safety and efficiency. That clearly requires coordination, but hopefully it will not cause wasteful duplication or sacrifice cutting-edge breakthroughs.

Aerospace and aviation research promise many benefits, but not without challenges. NextGen continues to lack clearly defined cost, schedule, and performance parameters. Last year, the FAA Inspector General testified that the initial cost estimate of $40 billion split between federal and private sector investment could double or triple, and that implementation could take an additional decade. This is unacceptable. Congress either needs better baselines and metrics to track progress, or a different plan. In the interim, I fear that valuable R&D funding, the seed corn of future prosperity, is being used to simply maintain World War II-era systems.

The challenges are also near-term. While Congress waits for NextGen details, reports of potential cyber vulnerabilities to aircraft and NextGen systems proliferate in the press. While recent allegations may be overstated, respected and knowledgeable experts, such as the Government Accountability Office and the National Research Council, have warned that cyber security should play a more prominent role in NextGen development.

I want to conclude by thanking our witnesses for being here today to discuss aeronautics and aviation research. This highly esteemed panel will certainly inform the Committee's consideration of the Research, Engineering, and Development activities at FAA. I look forward to their testimony and appreciate their participation.

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